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they" organization. No individual member concerned with the growth of our students and the importance of MRA in improving that growth can afford

to wonder when "they" will do something. You have a responsibility as does every other member.

(William Durr is Past President of the International Reading Association and the Michigan Reading Association. He is presently Professor of Education at Michigan State University.)

The Role of Reading Rate: An ERIC/RCS Report

by William H. Rupley,
Research Assistant

Eight hundred words per minute? Twenty thousand words per minute? Three hundred forty words per minute? How fast should Johnny read? Moreover, what is the role of reading rate in the developmental reading program? Many teachers are interested in learning more about the development of reading rate, flexibility in reading rate, factors which contribute to improvement in reading rate, and the optimal stage in reading development for introducing training in reading rate. Materials on these and related subjects may be found through the ERIC system.

Oneta Furr, in a paper presented at a conference of the International Reading Association, discusses the role that reading rate plays in a flexible reading program ["Improving Flexibility in Reading for the Advanced Student," ED 043 458, 17p.]. She states that reading maturity, flexibility and efficiency are dependent upon the reader's purposes and his repertory of reading skills. The flexible reader, as a result of his attention to purpose, difficulty of material, com-

plexity of theme, and background knowledge must make adjustments in his reading approaches. Variability in rate results from this reading-thinking process. Therefore, teachers should present their students with varied reading materials, provide exercises in reading for a variety of purposes and frequently assess progress in developing reading flexibility.

A similar paper by Phil Nacke also emphasizes the importance of reading rate in a flexible reading program ["Issues Relating to the Assessment of Flexible Efficient Reading," ED 049 889, 16p.]. Nacke, however, is more specific in discussing the reading behavior of skimming and difficulties related to measuring flexible reading efficiency. He believes that an integral dimension in the concept of flexible, efficient reading is the process of skimming, which is defined as the reading behavior in which information is processed without looking at all or most of the words in a reading passage. Nacke states that measurement of flexible reading effi-

ciency presents problems which revolve around four major issues. The first issue is concerned with the difficulty of measuring the faster rates of reading or those strategies involving the use of visual contextual restraint, that is, skimming. Measuring comprehension poses the second major difficulty, since careful reading is implied in the usual survey or diagnostic test. The small number of comprehension questions used and variation of the reader's background of information contribute to the problem. The third issue in assessing reading rate arises over the controversy as to which should be the independent variable — variations in purpose for reading or variations in difficulty and type of material. The fourth important issue is concerned with the need for valid and reliable flexibility scales whereby the rate and comprehension scores on the activities of the instrument are integrated.

“Strategies for Improving Our Concepts and Techniques in Regard to Speed Reading” by Melvin Howards [ED 042 575, 3p.] presents some suggestions teachers should consider when developing reading rate. Howards discounts the effects of currently promoted speed reading programs as resulting in short-term effectiveness and as disregarding a consideration of what constitutes good reading at any speed. He claims that the types and levels of transformations and interpretations, verbal and nonverbal, that must go into good reading are not susceptible to simple speed reading programs or formulas. He suggests that speed reading is best taught indirectly and that teachers need to focus on understanding the reading process as it is integrated with the total personality, intelligence, emotions, previous educa-

tion, and life experiences of the reader.

Two studies that relate to reading rate are “An Analysis of a Reading Rate Improvement Program in Grades Two, Four and Six” by Sylvia Louise Thomas [ED 067 653, 13p.] and “Reading Rates Attained by First-Year LISTEN, LOOK, LEARN Students” by Ann Brickner [ED 049 017, 15p.]. Thomas's study was concerned with instruction in reading rate acceleration and the effects upon comprehension. A six-week reading rate training program was completed by three experimental classes randomly selected in each of grades two, four, and six. The results indicated that pupils in the grade two experimental group made a significant gain in comprehension following the six weeks of reading rate training. In grade four the experimental group evidenced both a rate and comprehension gain significant at the five percent level of significance. None of these differences appeared to be affected by the interest factor during the rate training period.

The study conducted by Brickner could be useful for those teachers concerned about the role of reading rate in beginning reading. She compared the reading rates achieved by first graders who were taught reading by the Listen, Look, Learn materials and children who have had no instrument use as part of their reading instruction. In the Listen, Look, Learn program the Aud-X, Tach-X, and Controlled Reader Instruments were used to increase sight vocabulary, perceptual accuracy, and visual efficiency in order to affect reading rate as determined by the Controlled Reader dial setting. Data collected from a sample of 664 first-year Listen, Look, Learn students indicated that these children read at rates beyond those

reported for the norming sample and that reading rate achievement may be, in large part, a function of instrument use, since rate increase appear to be consistently related to Listen, Look, Learn cycles completed. The cycles completed reflect the amount of instrument use to which the children had been exposed. The average reading rate attained with comprehension was 137.5 words per minute after 15-20 cycles of Listen, Look, Learn instruction. Reading rate growth was found to be more consistent for the children who read in small groups.

Further information on these and other ERIC documents on reading rate can be obtained by consulting Research in Education (RIE) and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE).

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